

WABASH VALLEY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY YOUTH INCARCERATED AS ADULTS PROGRAM

In 2000 the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility became the designated facility in the State of Indiana for Youth Incarcerated as Adults (YIA). The program provides a secure environment for offenders under the age of eighteen who have been convicted in adult court for their crimes. The young men are housed in their own wing, separated from the adult offender population.

They are **not** separated from the opportunity to vastly improve their lives. Education is a top priority. Wabash Valley can proudly place its YIA education program in the forefront of innovative academic methodology.

At present, there are 54 YIA offenders receiving education services. We divide students into three categories: Literacy, Pre-GED and GED. Each of the three groups of students receives individualized attention, with a great deal of emphasis placed on small group activities and customized learning plans. In keeping with our mission of safety and security for the youth, we have established a YIA “school house” within the confines of their cell house. Three separate learning stations allow the youth to be rotated on an hourly basis throughout the learning stations. We have a so called “desk” area where students get to work one-one-one with teachers and assistants on assignments and classroom instruction. The second station is designed for individual quiet study time. During this time, students remain in their cells while one of our teaching assistants is assigned to roam among the cells, offering assistance and encouragement. The final station is the most popular with the youth. We have taken a small room formally used as storage and established a computer lab, utilizing laptop computers and an innovative learning software known as AZTEC. AZTEC focuses on basic skills by providing stimulating, challenging learning tools. Basic skills such as reading, language and math can be greatly enhanced by the use of these types of computer tutorials. It’s a big hit with the students, who have basically grown up with knowledge of computers and computer applications. By the end of the day, YIA students will have spent six hours in a classroom/education setting, but thanks to the use of our rotation system they have little chance to become bored or distracted.

Wabash Valley assigns a total of three dedicated academic staff members to the youth wing. We have a full-time special education teacher, an Adult Basic Education (ABE) teacher and a teaching assistant. These education professionals represent the key ingredient to the success of our YIA program. How do we measure success in our YIA program? To be sure 2008 alone over 34 YIA students have passed Literacy; another 27 have received their GED. But success can also be measured in terms of attitude and maturity on the part of the students. Teachers report when students first begin our program they are reluctant to participate and generally express an unhealthy opinion of school and education. A common statement is, “If I had been interested in education, I wouldn’t be here (in prison) today.” But, before too long, students begin to demonstrate an interest in what’s going on around them. They actually start to enjoy the education process. The program is successful because of dedicated staff, innovative teaching

methods, and an emphasis on the old-fashioned concept of the three Rs: Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic.

YIA offenders may also participate in Alcoholics Anonymous, Thinking for a Change (a cognitive behavior program), the first phase of our Substance Abuse Program, Inside out Dad's (a parenting program) and Coping skills (a program for offenders with Axis 1/mental health issues).

Phase One of Substance Abuse is the Education Phase. It is a study phase in which offenders receive a book are given a list of assignments, worksheet, quizzes and essays to complete. They must then pass a post-test with a score of 80 percent in order to go on to the next phase. Our Substance Abuse professionals work closely with the youth to help them overcome their addictions, which in many cases were contributing factors to their incarceration. Many times it is a matter of listening, really listening to them talk about their addiction issues. The youth come to understand we are here to help and truly support their recovery efforts. Nothing is more gratifying than to hear, as one substance abuse counselor relates, a young man saying "thank you" for coming to teach substance abuse.

Custody staff assigned to the unit undergoes special training to effectively monitor the YIA program. They are skilled in problem solving and dealing with adolescent stressors and anxieties associated with incarceration of younger offenders. By the time of this review they will have recently participated in additional specialized training offered by The Jason Foundation, which focuses on adolescent suicide indicators and prevention.

Volunteering is a wonderful way for the community to contribute to the success of the YIA unit. For over five years volunteer Dick Pemberton from Shelburn, Indiana has provided the 12 step Alcohol Anonymous Program to youth in the program. Like clockwork, every Friday afternoon Mr. Pemberton comes to work with the youth, in small groups, until they have completed all 12 steps. Mr. Pemberton is associated with a religious motor cycle group called Unchained Ministries and brings with him many of his own past experiences with substance abuse issues and how to deal with them.

Our Education Director, Karen Richards recently asked one of the teachers what they felt was the key to dealing with the youthful population. She replied, "Patience, patience, patience." Wabash Valley has patiently provided a positive environment for change, enhanced by quality programs and staff. The results may be seen many years down the road as our youth successfully return to society as community minded citizens.

The Wabash Valley YIA Program was honored as the 2008 recipient of the prestigious Indiana Correctional Association Warren W. Martin Award.

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